

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

June 9, 1972

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MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM:

Phil Odeen *PO*

SUBJECT:

Verification Panel Meeting on NSSM 128

A meeting of the Verification Panel on NSSM 128 (Nuclear Test Ban Policy Review) is tentatively scheduled for June 14, 1972. Your Talking Points are at Tab.

The reasons for holding this meeting are essentially political and bureaucratic. The U.S. has a commitment to seek a comprehensive ban on nuclear testing (CTB). We have maintained that on-site inspection is a necessary supplement to national means for adequate verification. Our current position is eroding in that insistence on on-site inspections (OSIs) is losing credibility in the face of improved seismic detection capabilities. NSSM 128 has analyzed our nuclear test ban policy and developed alternatives. There are sharp divisions, however, in the conclusions as to what should be done:

(1) OSD, JCS, and AEC tend to want to move to an explicit rejection of CTB (a la Laird and Schlesinger) on strategic grounds (reinforced by arguments that the Soviets in any case could do some clandestine testing). (The views of the JCS are at Tab.)

(2) State and ACDA urge that we honor our commitment and take the initiative to move toward an eventual CTB. They argue that CTB would buttress SALT by constraining sophisticated Soviet MIRV and SAM upgrade, and that CTB is politically desirable in terms of reinforcing our non-proliferation objectives and lessening the tensions and instabilities alleged to arise from the arms race effects of nuclear testing.

(3) Ed David has sent you a memo concluding that our strategic posture would not be jeopardized by a CTB and that OSIs should be dropped; however, he would defer undertaking a CTB because of the penalties imposed on advancing our nuclear technology. (His views are detailed in a memorandum to you at Tab.)

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NSSM 128 Study

Given these sharply differing and often emotional views, the NSSM 128 study tried to address the question rationally and analytically. The analysis strips away much of the dogma underlying opposition to a test ban as well as the assertions advocating a CTB as the sine qua non of world peace. As a result, the study generated sharp reaction from both proponents and opponents; neither side is satisfied with the analysis because it fails to support preconceived institutional conclusions. The broad conclusions of the analysis are:

-- The effects of a CTB on our strategic capabilities are insignificant unless unforeseen threats materialize in extreme form, and even these unlikely threats could be countered by means not requiring further nuclear testing.

-- Attainable national means appear adequate for verification, and the risks to the evader of clandestine testing are high.

-- The very low yields associated with the most plausible clandestine testing techniques that might escape seismic identification --
[REDACTED] -- are not likely to permit development of nuclear warheads that could upset the strategic balance.

-- A CTB could constrain Soviet MIRV development, as well as high yield U.S. counterforce RVs.

-- Development of low yield "clean" tactical weapons would be inhibited.

-- The political and arms control benefits are likely to be marginal.

-- In sum, the disadvantages of CTB have been overstated but there are few compelling reasons for the U.S. to make a major move toward a CTB.

The Immediate Problem

I doubt that any agency would advocate making a change in our position at this time. But, there is a risk that election-year polemics could engender efforts by either advocates or opponents to begin laying the public groundwork for their desired end result. This could make CTB a prominent and difficult political issue where there is not one now. The signing of the SALT agreement will also be used by Kennedy and others to argue for a test ban, and by DOD/JCS to argue against a test ban.

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Thus, the principal outcome of the meeting should be to recognize the uncertainties, emphasize the need to maintain the President's flexibility, and to reaffirm that the current U.S. position should not be undermined. It is important for now that we show no sign of moving one way or the other.

-- If we decide that CTB is in our interest, it could be imprudent to act on that decision now in view of the problems it might create among the President's principal supporters and the JCS during the SALT hearings.

-- If we concluded that a CTB was not in U.S. long-term interests, we would not want to abandon our current commitment to an adequately verifiable test ban and thereby provoke a critical international reaction and provide a political issue for the Democratic candidates. (Muskie, McGovern, Humphrey and Kennedy all favor a CTB).

Conduct of the Verification Panel Meeting

While the basic reason for the meeting is bureaucratic, I think you should start with a substantive discussion of the issues arising from the NSSM 128 study. In this manner you will be able to get first-hand the varying views and the intensity of the debate.

I would start first with the verification issue where there is a modicum of agreement that seismic detection is getting better. The arguments will be as follows:

-- AEC, OSD, JCS will argue the deterrent effect of on-site inspection and the possibilities for cheating. ACDA and State will dismiss the more exotic cheating scenarios and downplay the importance of lower-yield clandestine testing. There is some validity to the arguments on both sides.

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-- AEC, in particular, will argue that we must have peaceful explosions (PNEs) which make verification either impossible or highly intrusive. ACDA will argue that PNEs are not important to the U.S. The real question is the Soviet's attitude.

Secondly, you might take up the strategic issues:

-- ACDA, State will support the NSSM 128 study analysis arguing that: (1) a CTB would probably constrain Soviet threats and reinforce SALT; (2) we don't need new RVs to do most things, e.g., accuracy improvements are more important than yield increases; (3) we can adapt existing warheads to new delivery systems.

-- AEC, OSD, JCS will argue that there are major uncertainties as to our long-term future needs: (1) We might need new warheads for better flexible options; (2) we might want more MIRVs on MINUTEMAN to give it a greater capability for each surviving missile; and (3) tactical modernization is needed.

Thirdly, you should discuss the political issues, cautioning people not to get into public debate and to leave the issue for the President to decide.

Your Talking Points are written in this fashion. Following is a more detailed discussion of NSSM 128 issues and the Analytical Summary is at Tab.

The Strategic Analysis

Rather than merely accepting assertions that the outcome of a test ban would be disastrous, we ran a series of "war outcome" games using the standard computer models used by OSD, JCS and other DOD agencies involved in strategic force planning. A wide range of scenarios regarding Soviet cheating, state of knowledge, etc., were used. The results were that:

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-- The strategic deterrent capability of the U.S. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] is quite insensitive to a CTB through the 1970s.
The analysis also indicates that the Soviet retaliatory capability would not be changed by a CTB.

-- The damage limiting capability of an all-out counterforce first strike by either the U.S. or the Soviets was not affected by a CTB --
[REDACTED]

We did not just consider this "assured destruction" case. We also looked at the impact of CTB on flexible response options and counterforce capability.

-- For most flexible response options, CTB made no appreciable difference.

[REDACTED]

The impact of CTB on the Soviets would be much greater. For this reason it seems most unlikely they would actually agree to a ban if we dropped our on-site inspection demand. The reasons are:

-- Soviet technology is almost certainly significantly inferior to ours, especially in the area of small, high yield weapons. We were ahead of the Soviets in 1963 when atmospheric testing was ended. Since then we have conducted about 40 tests per year compared to about 14 for the Soviets.

-- The key to Soviet counterforce capability is deploying large numbers of relatively high yield MIRVs on the large missiles. A CTB might limit the Soviets to 3 to 6 warheads per SS-9 and make MIRVs

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for the SS-11 unlikely. Even if MIRVs were deployed, the number would be limited because of Soviet inability to produce efficient warheads.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] thus hedge our flexible response capability against the very high threats.

It can be argued that a test ban would reinforce our SALT agreements in other ways such as: (1) making SAM upgrade difficult because of the difficulty for the Soviets in developing small, high yield warheads, and (2) generally preventing the Soviets from catching up with our technology because they would have less efficient warheads.

A CTB would also limit us in weapons advances and make our SALT hedges more difficult. But we could proceed with ULMs using the current POSEIDON warhead for the ULMs missile and SPRINT for the Hard Site interceptor.

The above analyses are not accepted with enthusiasm by the bureaucracy, even though they have few specific objections.

-- OSD-AEC-JCS essentially disassociate themselves from the analysis on the grounds that we cannot afford to lose the incremental value of the nuclear technology option to respond to these unforeseen extreme threats. They are also likely to argue that continued nuclear testing is required to hedge against SALT failure and enable us to develop new warheads

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-- State-ACDA are unhappy with the implication that nuclear warhead development is not a major component of the arms race, but rejoice in the insensitivity indicated for the strategic balance.

Tactical Weapons Modernization

One area where a test ban would clearly have an impact is tactical weapons modernization. Testing is important because of the small size of weapons and the numerous improvements that have been proposed by weapons designers.

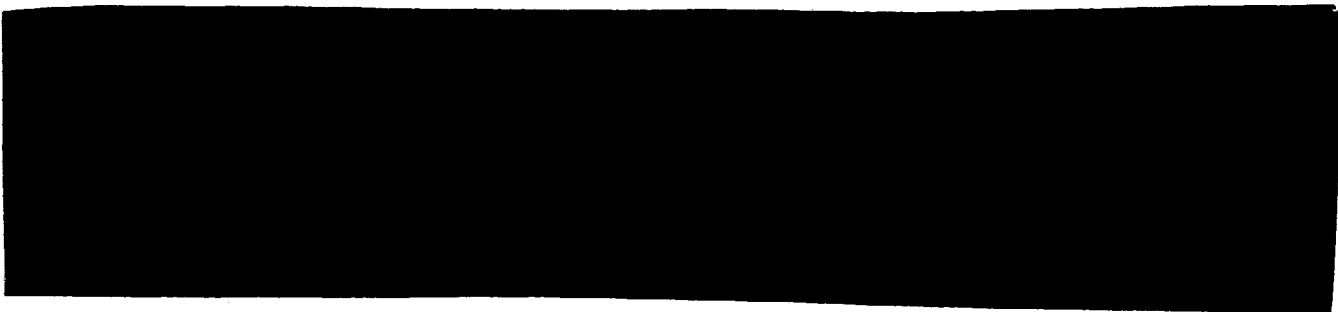
-- Considerable progress can be made without testing as new designs such as the LANCE and 155 mm artillery round have already been developed.

-- However, a strategy that relied on small, very clean weapons would be seriously inhibited.

Whether this brake on tactical nuclear modernization would really affect our forces and their employment is a different and more important question. We still lack a viable tac nuc warfighting strategy. Until someone makes the case that smaller and cleaner weapons are essential to a rational strategy, our inability to develop them will have little adverse impact. For deterrence purposes, current weapons seem fully adequate.

Verification

The U.S. stand on CTB has long been that we favor a test ban but must have on-site inspection to provide adequate verification. The seismic technology that is key to verification has improved markedly in recent years, thus our insistence on on-site inspection is becoming less and less credible.



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[REDACTED] This available capability prompts many advocates of a CTB to conclude that national means of verification are adequate, and leads to increasing pressures for a CTB.

Nevertheless, the possibility of successful clandestine testing remains real, particularly at very low yields.

[REDACTED]

There are no foolproof means of clandestine testing. The risks rise sharply with yield, [REDACTED] regardless of the means used.

[REDACTED]

The real uncertainty is whether Soviet leaders would take the risks of attempting clandestine testing.

Assessing CTB

Given the marginal nature of the verification and strategic risks (and the potential gain to us of limits on the Soviets), the issue is whether there is a net advantage to offset any potential risk.

The virtues of a CTB are equally marginal:

-- We can't argue that it saves the environment since there is no discernable environmental impact from underground testing.

-- Limiting Soviet MIRVing is not certain, and the longer a test ban is delayed the less likely these limits become. Moreover, the Soviets may already have suitable warheads for some SS-9 MIRVing (3-6 RVs), but probably not for 9-12 MIRVs nor MIRVs for SS-11 and SS-NX-8.

-- The argument that it "slows" the "arms race" is subverted by the fact that most weapons advances are more significant than improved warheads or can be done in spite of CTB -- e.g., submarine quieting, adaptation of existing nuclear devices to new delivery systems, accuracy improvements, bigger boosters, survivability measures, more MIRVs.

[REDACTED]

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-- A CTB is unlikely to save money since it will likely force development activity into less cost-effective areas without optimized warheads.

In short, the whole matter becomes a very speculative political issue which is subject to uncertainties that are not resolved by the study.
A central unknown is whether the Soviets really want a CTB, despite their persistent claims that they do.

-- Would agreement to "national means" of verification produce negotiations towards a test ban?

-- If the Soviets did not agree, would we come under pressure to make more concessions in order to obtain a CTB? (Our SALT experience, as well as our historical record in negotiations, would indicate that once we overcome our aversion to negotiating an issue, we are driven to continue to negotiate even under adverse circumstances.) What might these concessions be and how would they affect our security posture?

-- Would the negotiations be interminable with Soviet testing increasing at a substantial rate? Would we increase our own testing, how much, for what purpose, and at what political cost? Would we want a moratorium during negotiations?

We need to examine such issues more carefully before we can make any net judgment on a CTB. However, the results are likely to be inconclusive, subjective and highly contentious.

Future Decisions

What this means to me is that the CTB issue is very much in the balance with the weight of uncertainty (and election year political sensitivities from the right concerning arms control) arguing against moving forward on a CTB in the near future. However, the uncertainties and risks are not so great as to preclude the President from considering a CTB if he wants a new initiative in his second term.

If we continue to decide against a CTB we will eventually face the problem that insistence on OSI lacks credibility -- but we can get through the election without facing this issue and by standing on our traditional position.

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After the election we will have to consider (probably in sequence):

-- Whether we really want a CTB or not? If so, under what conditions? If not, do we renounce our commitment, for what rationale and at what political cost? Or, by what means can we defensibly continue to defer a CTB indefinitely while maintaining credible our commitment?

-- Ways to extract more mileage from verification by introducing new complicating conditions, e.g., unmanned seismic stations in the USSR; insisting that peaceful nuclear explosions not be banned and insisting on elaborate controls; insisting on an international seismic network for verification. Even if the Soviets accepted these conditions, as they might, negotiations on the modalities would likely be long and difficult. Moreover, we would have to face the sticky problem of whether to continue testing during negotiations or seek a moratorium. If the Soviets rejected these conditions, will we be any better off in terms of the credibility of our commitment?

-- Whether to insist upon Chinese (and French) participation in a CTB, another difficult choice fraught with political problems either way we decide.

-- A Threshold Test Ban (TTB) which bans tests above a certain seismic magnitude which permits yields adequate to most purposes (e.g., 100-200 KT). A TTB leads inevitably to greater pressures for a CTB but only over a long period of time. If we really do not want a full test ban now but feel it desirable to make a forward move for political reasons, this could be an attractive option.